

## **MEETING AGENDA**

### **North Carolina National Park, Parkway and Forests Development Council**

*May 1, 2009*

*1:00 PM –3:00 PM*

*NCDENR Regional Office  
Swannanoa, NC*

*Council Members Present: Maxine Dalton / Chair, Steve Legeay, Claude Douthit, Myrna Campbell*

*Council Members Absent: Eric Jenkins, Bob McCollum, Patsy Lovedahl, Tom Massie*

*Others Present: Judy Francis / NCDENR-Occa, Tom Jackson / NCDENR-DPR, Rick Wooten / NCGS, Phil Francis / NPS-Blue Ridge Parkway, Greg Yates /NCDENR-DFR*

The meeting was called to order at 1:05. Chair-person Dalton welcomed all in attendance and asked everyone to introduce themselves and state the entities that each person represented.

Chair-person Dalton then reminded the council that meeting summaries will now be approved via electronic communication so that they may be circulated to other interested parties in between meetings. She did that last time and had several folks call with questions and inquiries for more info.

Chair-person Dalton said that replacement members for Claude Douthit and Steve Legeay, whose terms expire July 1, had been appointed by the Governor's Office. Jonathon Douthit will be the replacement member for Swain County. Nelda Holder will be the replacement for Buncombe County. Resumes for each of the new members were shared with those in attendance. The new members will be invited to the joint-meeting with the TN Council on 6/24.

#### Agency Updates

Phil Francis- NPS / Blue Ridge Parkway – The Parkway will receive approximately \$13.3 million through the economic stimulus funds and \$11.5 million of that will be spent in NC for guard rail replacement. There is about another \$70 million in funding from other sources that will come to the Parkway. Fiscal year base funding is up a million dollars also, so it may actually be possible to fill a couple vacant positions. One lane should be open at Craggy Gardens sometime this Spring. There are many 75th anniversary activities coming up. The first event will be Nov. 13 &14 in Cherokee which will be the “pass off” from GSMNP. A symposium at Appalachia State University, another symposium at Virginia Tech, and another major event at Cumberland Knob in September of 2010 are being planned. The 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary theme is getting lots of positive publicity and cooperation from both states. The Parkway will have a new Deputy Superintendent starting in June. Her name is Monica Mayer and she is currently at

Vicksburg National Military Park. There is also a new Volunteer Coordinator - Shaun Rose from western NC started this week.

Mary Noel / US Forest Service – Provided comments and a written handout containing the following information: **Land Acquisition:** Work is continuing by the forest and its forest partners to support the two priority acquisition projects for 2010 – Catawba Falls and the Appalachian Trail. We are also starting to evaluate and prioritize a large number of projects for submittal to compete for FY 2011 Land and Water Conservation Fund acquisition. **Upcoming Management Decisions:** The comment period for the Upper Tellico OHV Area Environment Assessment (EA) has closed and comments are being evaluated. A final decision on the long-term management of this area is expected by summer. **Economic Stimulus Projects:** The forest submitted over \$30 million of possible projects for implementing job creation in North Carolina. These include facility rehabilitation, road and trail maintenance, and assistance with key resource restoration projects. We are still waiting for a final list of approved projects, but it should come in the next week or two. Our primary goal through this project is to create new jobs in local communities. **Restoration Efforts:** The Steering Team working with the forest on restoration initiatives met last month and initially will be forming two working groups – one to deal with invasive plants (with a special **Upcoming Management Decisions:** The comment period for the Upper Tellico OHV Area Environment Assessment (EA) has closed and comments are being evaluated. A final decision on the long-term management of this area is expected by summer. **Economic Stimulus Projects:** The forest submitted over \$30 million of possible projects for implementing job creation in North Carolina. These include facility rehabilitation, road and trail maintenance, and assistance with key resource restoration projects. We are still waiting for a final list of approved projects, but it should come in the next week or two. Our primary goal through this project is to create new jobs in local communities. **Restoration Efforts:** The Steering Team working with the forest on restoration initiatives met last month and initially will be forming two working groups – one to deal with invasive plants (with a special focus on Roan Mountain) and one for combating the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid. Work will also continue on reviewing our first round of rapid assessment projects. **Recreation Projects:** Several major recreation projects are getting under way this summer apart from the stimulus funding. The Lake Powhatan Campground near Asheville is getting the sewer system rebuilt along with replacements for sewer lines and several bathrooms/shower houses. Standing Indian Campground, on the Nantahala District between Franklin and Murphy, is getting replacement toilet/shower buildings and a new water system. Also, seven new vault toilets will be installed at dispersed recreation areas throughout the western part of the state. The total value of these improvements is over \$3 million. **Cave Closure Expected Soon:** The Regional Forester for the Southern Region will soon be issuing a region-wide closure order for caves and mines to help limit the spread of White Nose Syndrome, a fungus that has led to the massive loss of bats from infected caves in the northeastern US. The local caving community will be notified and asked to assist with these efforts.

Greg Yates / NCDENR Division of Forest Resources – Budget limitations continue to have an impact on operations. The NC BRIDGE Program may survive this budget cycle

after all and seems to have a lot of support from local citizens in the western region. Thanks to USFS on cooperating with fire issues this Spring. They were a major help because of the state's financial limits right now. DFR staff will be participating on the USFS restoration committee, a working lands easement work group, and continued landowner outreach. The units of Educational Forests are all short on staff. Due to limited staff and fire duty, the forest assessment work is behind schedule but coming along. There are currently eleven open positions and two retirements pending during this personnel hiring freeze. There is a new DFR office in Sylva opening soon.

Tom Jackson / NCDENR Division of Parks and Recreation – Chimney Rock Park planning continues and the enabling legislation was passed by the General Assembly. Other recent activities include work plan updates, dealing with budget limitations, and dedication of the Ridgeline Trail – a connection between Crowders Mountain SP and Kings Mountain. The dedication event got quite a bit of good press and was well attended. The new Mt. Mitchell observation tower will have a dedication ceremony on May 9. Gorges State Park improvements include a parking lot and a new paved road which will be opening soon. The Lake James State Park expansion improvements are currently under construction. – An on-line reservation system is now functioning and will be refined as more people begin to use the site.

Judy / NCDENR Office of Conservation and Community Affairs – The new NCDENR Secretary has announced that his priorities will include:

- Develop division energy plan with strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- Develop climate change adaptation strategies that align with division mission.
- Support water for the future (quality, supply, drought management, stormwater).
- Support green economy (jobs that are environmentally friendly).
- Continue land conservation (to fulfill Million Acre goal).
- Support air quality improvement.

There is a great deal of concern about potentially losing the conservation tax credits program. Maxine asked the Board if they would support sending a letter to the leaders of the House and Senate to emphasize the importance of the program. All members unanimously agreed. Judy also briefly explained some budget issues budget including the Executive Order mandating a freeze on per diem / travel expenses for councils and commissions. The Council members agreed to continue meetings without reimbursement until the per diems / travel funds were once again reinstated.

#### Council Member Comments

Maxine Dalton said she and Judy attended the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary event at Clingmans Dome, a beautiful day and a very nice ceremony. She also shared a letter she received from the Governor's office re: open meetings law requirements. She also joined the new Assistant NCDENR Secretary David Knight for dinner in Asheville with several representatives from land trusts. She did receive a response letter regarding the North Shore Road settlement from SE NPS Director Vela and he acknowledged work done so far and stressed that they are working on it now.

Myrna Campbell – Congressman Shuler’s office in DC is short staffed as two people leaving. A new legislative director will be coming on-board in mid-May. A new Asheville staff person may come to the September Council meeting.

Steve Legeay – Thanked the Council members and Judy for their work during his term on the Council which expires in July.

Guest Speaker

*Rick Wooten, NC Geological Survey, Steep Slope / Landslide Hazard Area Mapping*

Rick provided a Powerpoint presentation regarding his landslide hazard area mapping project in WNC. The presentation included background about NCGS and the scientific importance of public lands. The Incidence of landslides increases dramatically in WNC when there is more than 5” of rain in 24 hrs,. Most damaging type of landslide is a debris flow. He also presented some specific examples, data sources, and information availability. He is currently completing the mapping of Watauga County and others will follow.

Other Business / Member Recognition

Chairperson Dalton presented Steve Legeay with a framed “thank you” letter from the Governor, and also thanked him on behalf of all Council members for his service to the Council. She also presented a framed “thank you” letter from the Governor to Claude Douthit and thanked him for his 16 years of service to the Council.

Next Meeting: June 24, 2009 / Joint Mtg. w/ TN Council at Purchase Knob in Great Smoky Mountain National Park – There will be no July Meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 3:05 PM.